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The State as God.

TO the Englishman, the doctrine that divine honours are to be ascribed to the State is exotic. He is aware, of course, that during the last century the State has increasingly intervened in his life, so that he can no longer truthfully say that after he has registered the births, marriages and deaths in his family, paid his income-tax, and recorded his vote, he has no further contacts with the State. Nevertheless, he has still a very large number of interests with which the State is not concerned. The State remains a somewhat shadowy figure in the background, and he tolerates its activities as a necessary nuisance. The claim that the State should be brought into the foreground, enthroned, and invested with the attributes of deity is a novelty alien to all his ways of thought and life.

This theory, which may briefly be described as the totalitarian theory of the State, is, however, enthusiastically received by many nations of the world. It is the basis of all totalitarian systems of government; Italian Fascists hold it; combined with the theory of racial purity, it is the foundation of German Nazism; while, by a strange paradox, Russian Communists profess it in a form which extols class rather than nation. Even in the democracies which repudiate it are to be found groups who accept it, though they are usually careful to exhibit its essential tenets under the guise of efficiency in politics and discipline in the nation. Indeed, at home and abroad, we rarely hear this political doctrine simply and clearly expounded as a theory; we are much more familiar with accounts of its practical application in the economic and political life of nations.

Some of the most difficult of political questions are raised by the relation between the community and the individual. Has the individual any rights against the State? How far is the State justified in interfering in the lives of its individual members? What are the duties of the individual to the State? These and cognate questions frequently arise both in the political thought and in the practice of modern nation-States. They do not arise, however, in the more primitive communities of the world, because their members have not yet clearly distinguished the community from the individual possessor of a moral personality. Amongst them, the group or tribe completely conditions the life of the individual. He has no independence, and indeed he never thinks of himself as set over against his tribe. Its customs and superstitions are his morals and religion; its enemies

are his enemies; his highest ideal is its security, and disloyalty is his blackest crime. In the ancient world, even amongst civilised people, the outlook was similar. Thus Plato thought that at least for the ordinary man in the State, goodness consisted in doing what his rulers commanded. The distinction between the individual and the community was first clearly drawn by Christianity, when it placed its great emphasis on the worth of the individual. The conception was among the most outstanding contributions of Christianity to Western thought. For the first time, the individual was regarded as an end in himself; he was invested with a personality which, since it was respected by God, must be respected by men, and he was pointed to ideals which he was expected to place before those indicated to him by his government. It is significant that Rome persecuted the early Church, not so much for religious beliefs, as for the view they implied that the individual Christian had a duty which was not necessarily identical with his duty to Caesar as the incarnation of the Roman Empire. What Caesar, like his modern counterparts, refused to tolerate, was not the Christian religion, but the Christian assertion that some parts of life were beyond his absolute authority. This assertion raised the whole question of the relation of the individual to the State. The question has since received many answers; among them is that of modern totalitarianism. It has been elaborated during the last century, though it was first formulated by the Greek philosophers; it is intricate and abstract, so that in the interests of brevity and clarity only its more general assertions will be mentioned.

We may begin by considering its first assertion: *that the State creates the personality of the individuals who are its members.* Most of us have read the story of Robinson Crusoe. For a long time he lived alone on his island without meeting any other human being; he not only lived, but he enjoyed at least some of the advantages of civilisation. In Robinson Crusoe, or better, in his prototype, Alexander Selkirk, we have an example of a man who was able to live as a human being in complete isolation from all his fellows. So it appears until someone asks: were not his parents members of a community? Did he not inherit from his home and from the town in which he grew up, his language, many of his customs, beliefs, and ways of thought? Even though he was isolated from social life, he was born into it, and he was pursued by it into exile. His State made him what he was by determining the general lines of his life. Similarly, it is argued, the life of every one of us is determined by the State in which we live. It takes notice of us when we are born, it bestows upon us our parents, homes, language, customs, nearly everything which assists in the formation and development of our characters.

In short, it makes us the persons we are; as Aristotle remarked, only beasts and gods are independent of society.

The totalitarian proceeds to argue that since the State makes us persons, it therefore has an absolute claim upon us. Our debt to it is so great that it can never be repaid; hence all our service and even the sacrifice of our life itself scarcely discharges our indebtedness. "The State," says Hegel, "is the ultimate end which has the highest right over the individual, whose highest duty is to be a member of the State."

The recognition of the State's paramount importance in fashioning our personality and in bestowing significance upon our random ways of life purges us of selfishness. The totalitarian declares that, "Tendencies to self-assertion and aggression are transcended in the service of an ideal and in obedience to a leader, and the individual is lifted out of the pit of vanity and desire which is the self and is merged in something which is greater than the self." Moreover, since the outlook of the individual is restricted by his "vanity and desire," the objects which he wills as an individual are not his own real interests as a social person, and his own private will is not his real will. His real will is the will of the State of which he is a member. Dr. Cyril Joad, to whom I am indebted for some quotations, has an interesting illustration of this point. From the totalitarian point of view, "the policeman who arrests the burglar and the magistrate who locks him up, are really expressing the burglar's real will to be arrested and locked up, the policeman and magistrate being the executive officials of a State which necessarily represents and expresses the real will of the burglar, who is a member of it. . . . Familiar applications of this doctrine in the contemporary world are afforded in the totalitarian States which take obnoxious persons into protective custody, 'for their own good,' and forcibly 'heal' the 'diseased minds' of . . . democrats and pacifists in concentration camps through the ministrations of officers who claim to represent the victims' own will to be healed."

Hence the State which creates us manifests itself in us, and our wills, illusory and divisive when they function in us as individuals, are real and unifying when they express the general will of the State. To quote Hegel again: "The State carries back the individual whose tendency is to become a centre of his own, into the life of the universal substance"; when, therefore, the will of the individual conflicts with the will of the State, the latter must always prevail, because the individual merely wills his apparent good, while the State always wills his real good. Consequently, the individual, being ethically and politically incompetent, must be denied the right of deciding either his own

good or that of the State. Hence he must accept, but not decide, the State's policy; he must extol, but never criticise, the actions of the rulers. To criticise would be to attempt the impossible of refusing consent to decisions which, if he were not prevented by a limited intelligence, he would perceive were really his own.

Secondly: *This doctrine affirms that the State itself has personality.* We sometimes use such phrases as, "the spirit of a people" or "the soul of a nation"; we probably mean by them the expression of the deepest thoughts and feelings of the majority of the individuals who compose the people or the nation. Similarly, we often use the personal pronoun in speaking of our own country, though it is doubtful whether we use it in any but a metaphorical sense. In the totalitarian theory, however, the personality of the State is not merely the aggregate of the persons who belong to it, and is certainly not a mere metaphor. Thus Mussolini writes: "The Fascist State is itself conscious and has itself a will and a personality—thus it may be called the ethic State." The English writer, F. H. Bradley, expressed a similar view when he wrote: "What we call an individual man is what he is because of and by virtue of community, and communities are not mere names, but something real." Just as a symphony is more than the musical notes which make it, and exists in the composer's mind as an ordered whole before it gives form to the collection of disparate notes, so the State is more than the aggregate of the persons who belong to it and has a personality which is logically prior to and transcendent over the personalities of the individual citizens. The personality of the individual is, indeed, but a particular and partial expression of the personality of the State. Above every private citizen, then, is set the person of the State whose will is absolute and real. So greatly is the State exalted that Hegel can say: "The existence of the State is God's movement in the world."

Thirdly: According to this doctrine, *the State is the source of the moral values of its citizens.* The individual may be mistaken in what he thinks is good because his outlook is limited, and the objects which as an individual he wills may not be those which he has really chosen, because his will is unreal. What is good for him is what the State wills. The moral world does not include within its borders and subject to its laws both the individual and the State; on the contrary, the moral world for the individual is completely circumscribed by the State. Justice is what the State decrees, and the whole duty of the individual is to accept the State's decisions. To quote Herr Wagner, the Bavarian Minister of the Interior: "What Hitler decides is right and will remain eternally right. Whatever is useful to the German people is right. Whatever is harmful is wrong." The

same view was expressed even more succinctly by General Goering when he announced to the Public Prosecutor and the State Attorneys in 1934 that "Justice and Hitler's will are one and the same thing." Within the State, therefore, the moral life of the individual is co-terminous with his political life. Further, no associations into which he enters can be permitted to have aims other than those of the State. All groups must regard themselves as expressions of the State's will. To quote Mussolini again: "Fascism conceives of the State as an absolute in comparison with which all individuals or groups are relative, and only to be conceived of in their relation to the State." Thus a football team playing an international match is more than a football team; it is a repository of the State's spirit. Its victory is the expression of the State's power; its defeat the evidence of the foul play and malevolence of the State's opponents. Since the Naples football team was regarded from the Fascist point of view as an integral part of the State, it was logical when the players degraded their country by losing a European cup in 1936 that the State should punish them by fining them £25 each.

Since the State is the absolute source of all morality, it follows that in all its dealings with other States it must always be right. There is no moral law above the State to which it must conform and by reference to which its activity may be judged. Thus, the late Dr. Bosanquet, one of the foremost English exponents of the totalitarian theory of the State, declared that he found it "hard to see how the State can commit theft or murder in the sense in which these are moral offences." The only guiding light for the State in its relations with other States is its own glory and the triumph of its own will. Its foreign policy can never be wrong, for the State itself is the source of all ethical value; that which it wills is right, and it cannot deny itself by willing wrong. Hence, in all its foreign affairs, its own policy is the criterion of righteousness; the ethical considerations which govern its diplomacy are considerations of its own advantage. It follows that any other power which challenges the State's authority must be wicked, and in the interests of righteousness and political justice it must be opposed by force. Not only so, the tendency of such a State is inevitably towards self-aggrandisement; destiny imposes on it a civilising mission; hence it has the duty of subduing by force of arms, and for their own good, the "lesser breeds without the law." It is, indeed, in the omnipotence of the State in time of war that the totalitarian theory of the State finds it logical development. "The state of war," says Hegel, "shows the omnipotence of the State in its individuality; country and fatherland are then the power which convicts of nullity the independence of individuals."

Any attempt to prevent war by subjecting the actions of the State to international judgment and control must be strenuously resisted. Membership of an international society like the League of Nations impugns the State's absolute sovereignty; consequently, it must regard with hostility the ideals of humanity on which the internationalism of the League is based, and treat any sympathy with them on the part of its citizens as the deadliest treason.

We are now in a position to sum up the answer which the totalitarian theory of the State gives to the perplexing question with which we began. This theory regards the community as an organism with life, personality and will. The individual citizens are its parts which it constitutes and transcends. The will of the community must order their life in all its details. Their highest good is its welfare, and their supreme duty the fulfilment of its commands. Apart from the State which bears, nurtures, and protects them, their existence is as "a madman's tale, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

On this view, the State has many characteristics which the religion, at least of the Western world, attributes to God. It is the creator of persons as God is; for its citizens, it is the absolute reality, as God is for His creatures; as the Divine will is supreme for men whose highest good consists in obedience to it, so the State's will is supreme, and complete submission to it is the citizen's highest good. Nor is it only in theory that the deified State is to be worshipped. In totalitarian States political meetings are religious services. Dr. Stephen Roberts, in his book, *The House that Hitler Built,* says: "Hitler has stolen the sanctions of religion for his own movement." The vehement preaching of Nazi doctrine, the demand for implicit faith in the leader, the surrender of the critical spirit, and the fervid emotionalism of party rallies, all bear testimony to the truth of the statement. And the statement would still remain largely true if the name of Mussolini or Stalin was substituted for that of Hitler.

But the philosophy of totalitarianism, though quasi-religious, is completely opposed to Christian faith. The "Bible" of the German Faith Movement says that it is not in Jesus Christ that the modern Nazi believes, but "in the German, God's other beloved Son." Reconciliation between totalitarianism and Christianity is impossible; both exalt for worship an absolute God, both declare that their God tolerates no rivals, and both have radically different views of human nature. Herr Rosenberg, the chief exponent of German racial theory, rightly says that "a citizen enjoying full rights and responsibilities cannot logically owe allegiance to the Catholic or Lutheran Church" and at the same time be a good follower of Hitler.

It would be mistaken to hold that this totalitarian view of the State is wholly without merit, and before proceeding to a criticism of it, it may be convenient to indicate some of its merits. It is, for example, a sustained attack on the exaggerated individualism of much English political thought. It insists that "we are all members one of another," and emphasises the debt which every individual owes to the community to which he belongs. When the theory is applied to the political life of the nation, desirable social reforms are hastened, and efficiency in administration is no longer subordinated to party tactics; while in the individual it encourages discipline, kindles enthusiasm, evokes patriotism, and inspires self-sacrifice.

Nevertheless, in spite of these merits, and in spite of the even greater glories proclaimed by its enthusiastic advocates, this political doctrine which regards the State as God is logically false, ethically wicked, and religiously blasphemous.

First: *The whole theory is vitiated by a disastrous confusion of the ideal with the actual.* When, for example, Hegel says that "The State is the ultimate end which has the highest right over the individual," is he referring to the State as it ought to be, that is, to the State as it is ideally, or to the State as it actually is? He would reply, doubtless, that he is referring to the ideal State, and would add that every State which falls short of the ideal is thus far not the State. But he never clearly indicates when he means the ideal State and when he means the States we know from experience. Moreover, he invests the actual State with attributes which should properly belong only to the ideal State. Even if it were true that the ideal State had the highest right over the individual, it would not therefore follow that the imperfect State of which he is a member also has that right.

Secondly: *This theory confuses the State with society.* The two terms are not identical in meaning; society is the complex net-work of relationships in which men stand to one another, the State is merely the relationship into which men are brought for the purpose of government. We may agree that in a significant sense, society creates the personality of its members, inasmuch as a person with no social relationships is a contradiction in terms. But this admission in no way justifies the conclusion that the State likewise is the creator of the personality of its members. Among some primitive peoples, civil government is almost non-existent, but their members enjoy a social life and they are social beings. Of the great nation-States of the Western world, and of the totalitarian States in particular, it is not even true to say that they enhance the personality of their members, far less that they create it. State regimentation tends to obliterate the differences between people, to curb initiative, and to change

persons into puppets. Lord Baldwin remarked in a well-known epigram, "The totalitarian State is like a chestnut tree—nothing will grow under it." And growth is one of the chief characteristics of personality.

Thirdly: *The theory that the State has personality is a delusion.* Dr. Joad has pointed out that while we may concede that "groups may be endowed with the juristic personalities which the law imputes to them, these personalities are, in a quite literal sense, legal figments." He quotes the verdict of Prof. Barker: "To talk of the real personality of anything other than the individual human being is to indulge in dubious and perhaps nebulous speech. When a permanent group of ninety-nine members is in session in its place of meeting, engaged in willing the policy of the group, it is permissible to doubt whether a hundredth person supervenes." Further, men belong to international economic, cultural, and religious groups. Have these groups personalities like the State? On what grounds is personality denied to them? If their personality is also admitted, it is difficult to see why their rights over their members should not be as absolute as those said to belong to the group personality of the nation-State. We may doubt whether the doctrine of the personality of the State is anything more than a device for justifying the unlimited despotism of those who have seized power in the State.

Finally: *The State is not the source of moral values.* Dr. Roberts sums up the philosophy of National Socialism as "the taboo system of savages plus a warped mystical interpretation of modern history." "The Germans have resurrected tribal instincts and the mythical sanctions of a savage society." But totalitarianism in all its forms, and not only in Nazism, is a return to tribal group morality. Primitive man has a right to live only as a member of his tribe, and to his tribe he is bound to give, without even the appearance of hesitation, whatever is demanded for its security. The tribe's gods are his gods; the tribe's customs are his only moral law. He buys all his religious and ethical customs from the tribal shop. Likewise, the morality of members of the totalitarian State is that of the tribe or group rather than that of humanity; their ethical conceptions are determined by the group in which they happen to find themselves; right and wrong depend for them not in the last resort on the fact that they were born with a human nature, but on the fact that they were born in a bedroom situated in a certain geographical area. It is essential to the genuinely ethical point of view, however, that it shall refer to humanity as a whole and not only to a group in it. If we insist on the absolutism of a group, then ethical relations with other groups are impossible.

The social nature of man is alone adequate as a basis of justice within the State and between States. That the State is the final arbiter of all questions of morals is a view which ignores the whole trend of man's ethical development. Regard, not for the interests of the State, but for those of humanity, is at once the only basis of an adequate morality, and the only hope for future moral progress.

These remarks may serve to introduce a brief account of the democratic view of the relation of the individual to the community.

As democrats, we may admit no less enthusiastically than the totalitarians the claim of society on the individual, but we must resolutely refuse to equate, as they do, society with government. It is true that the individual ceases to be himself apart from his social context. But it is not true that the individual ceases to be himself apart from a particular form of political government. He is a full ethical personality apart from government. It is the function of government to protect that personality, not to constitute it. Or, in other words, it is the function of the State to provide the minimum background for the growth of the individual in that kind of good life made possible for him in virtue of his humanity. On this view, it is not part of the State's business to lay down in what the good life shall consist. Given that every individual citizen has the right to lead his own life in accordance with his own moral code, it is the business of the State to see that every individual can, with equal freedom, exercise this right. Such is the general principle underlying the democratic conception of the State. The modern world owes it, let it never be forgotten, chiefly to English Nonconformists, who proclaimed it and suffered for it in the seventeenth century.

It follows on this view that States are bound by genuine ethical considerations, both in dealing with their citizens and in dealing with one another. Morality depends not on the decisions of the divine State, but on human nature; hence the individual State has a moral obligation to the whole of humanity. In modern Europe, thanks to the totalitarian theory of the State, this moral obligation is ignored or denied. If it be true, as Hobhouse says, that "each nation is a member of a family of nations which together constitute humanity," and that "each State gains a greater glory from the service of humanity of which it is a part than from the realisation of its own private ends," to this ideal we are approaching slowly and with many setbacks.

Throughout this paper I have been urging the importance of the totalitarian doctrine for political theory, but, as I have mentioned, it is also very important for religion. It is one of the substitutes for Christianity, and its popularity confirms the

words of Canon F. R. Barry: "Before all else, man is a worshipper. . . . If he cannot find God in heaven, he must fall down before a god on earth and deify some idol of his own making." The State is, I hold, one of the worst idols men have made, and its worship the source of one of the worst tyrannies men have known. If, however, we are to prove that a free man's service is a finer thing than the pagan servitude demanded by the totalitarian State and gladly endured by its citizens, we can do so only by giving even more gladly to our commonwealth the devotion it asks, and by showing that more potent to inspire such devotion than the totalitarian ideals of discipline, order and power, which are based on philosophic theory and Nordic legend, are the democratic ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, grounded in our Christian faith.

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